

Sea Search

Scientists find great surprises in the Great Barrier Reef.

Brightly colored fish dart in and out of the Great Barrier Reef. That is a




coral reef in Australia. Australia is a country *and* a continent. A coral reef is a large underwater structure full of plants and animals. Coral is made of tiny sea animals called **polyps**. When polyps die, their hard shells become part of the reef.

Scientists recently explored the world's largest coral reef. They also looked at another reef near Australia. Their search turned up hundreds of animal species. Some of the species may have never been seen before.

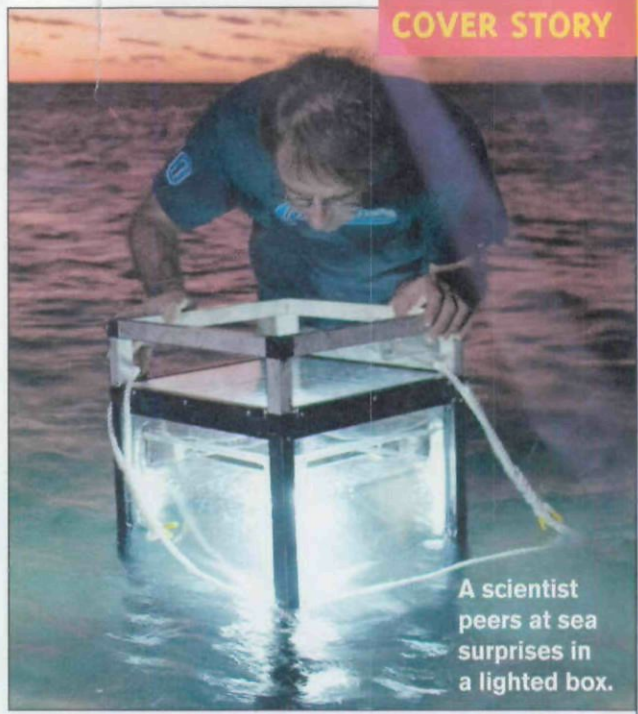
Scientists used netted bags to search the reef. They spied big-clawed shrimp and worms shaped like pine trees. They also found about 130 new types of soft coral.

The researchers left behind 36 plastic "houses" on the ocean floor. The scientists hope the creatures will move into the houses. That will make it easier to study them.

Learning about the creatures may help people protect them. One-third of the world's coral reefs are threatened by pollution and fishing. It's important to find out what's in the Great Barrier Reef, says scientist Patricia Hendriks. She took part in the **expedition**, or trip with a specific goal. "If we don't know what is present in the first place, how are we ever going to protect it properly?" 



THINK ABOUT IT: In what ways can people help protect the Great Barrier Reef?



A scientist peers at sea surprises in a lighted box.

Far-Out Finds

What species did scientists spy in the Great Barrier Reef? Here are a few that made a splash.



This green-banded snapping shrimp has a large claw on one side. It looks like a tiny lobster.



This Christmas tree worm rests on a coral reef. It uses its "branches" to breathe and eat.



The cuttlefish is a boneless animal related to squid. It has eight arms that it uses to catch food.



This gorgonian fan won the hearts of researchers. The soft coral fan stretches more than 3 feet tall.

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